WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?
Program 212
Laying Our Burdens Down
by Ernest O'Neill

There's a story that is told about a man who was walking along a country road, a very old man, bent over with age, but also bent over with the weight of a huge bundle of logs that he was carrying. And he struggled along the road, mile after mile, until he heard a noise behind him. And looking round he saw a cart and horse coming towards him. And on it was a young man, much younger than him, who was bringing the horse and cart along at quite a pace. And the old man stepped back a little, to the side of the road to let him past. And then was surprised when the young man stopped the horse and cart and called down to him and said, "Can I give you a ride further to your destination in the next village?"

And the old man at first, of course, wouldn't think of the burden that he would be putting on the young man to take him to his village and a little out of his way. But then he gave in and said, "Yes, I'd really appreciate that a lot." And so he struggled up onto the cart beside the young man, and had his bundle of logs on his back. And the old man sat there and the young man got the horse going again. And after a few yards the young man looked round in surprise, because he expected the old man, of course, to put his logs down on the cart and relax a little and enjoy himself.

Instead of that the old man was still sitting there with the logs perched on his shoulder, bent over with the weight of the logs. And the young man said to him, "Now listen, why don't you just throw the logs down in the back of the cart there, and you can relax while we're driving and enjoy the scenery, and we can talk." And the old man looked up at him in surprise and said, "Oh no, I

couldn't do that. It's good enough of you to carry me but to ask your horse to carry my logs as well would be utterly unfair."

And of course, we all smile knowingly and brightly and intelligently, and think, "How dumb can you get? Didn't the old guy know that the horse and cart was pulling the logs anyway? I mean, just because he had them on his shoulders didn't mean that the horse wasn't carrying his logs as well as him. Of course it was. Didn't he realize that?" And we of course think, "How stupid can you get?" But really that's a good picture of the way most of us live our lives.

What we have been sharing over this past year is that the order and design in the universe suggests to us that there is a Maker, that there is an intelligent Mind behind it, and that He is responsible for it all and responsible for our existence. And then, as you know, we've followed through the study of the historicity of that man, Jesus of Nazareth, and come to the conclusion that He was really the Son of the Maker of this universe. And He explained to us through His followers that His Father had made us and put us here so that we would begin to develop the world in the way He had planned.

And in the doing of it we'd become like Him, so that after this life was over we would actually live with him as His children, as His sons and daughters for ever, and develop the rest of the universe along with Him. And therefore, all our lives are dependent on this Maker and we are utterly dependent on Him ourselves. And if you say, "Well, I don't see that." Well, let me put it to you. Do you know what holds the earth in the middle of space? If you say glibly, "Oh, the law of gravity or magnetic powers," well, I mean, you know it's just a name we give to a thing that we can't see, or something we can demonstrate but we cannot really create.

So in a way, the earth is really like a cart, pulled by some invisible horse. And it has us on it, and it is towing us along. Indeed, if you look at your heart and the way it beats and the way that no doctor can really explain what starts the beat, or can explain where the electricity comes to start off that beat, in a sense our heartbeat and indeed the circulation of our blood is part of that horse and cart. We are kept going and held up by things that are outside our own abilities and powers to control.

And yet many of us reject that whole idea. And we live like the old man. We say, "Well, yes, there's some power that is pulling us along. We don't know quite what it is. There's some power, obviously. I do not, you're right, have control over the earth. I cannot prevent it falling, falling, falling in space if it chooses to. I cannot actually even keep my own blood circulation going if it chooses to stop. I can't actually start my heart if it stops up to certain limits. But I still think that I am in control of my own life, and I'm going to carry my own wood." So of course, that is what we do.

You know that the old man lived in unreality. I mean, he sat there on the cart with the wood on his shoulders enduring tremendous physical strain and being tensed up, and having all his muscles constricted, and yet he didn't need to at all. But he lived in strain, trying to pretend that he was carrying everything that needed to be carried. Really we live the same way. We live as if our futures are utterly dependent on the efforts we put forth. And we live as if our cash flow, the paying of our bills and the meeting of our debts is utterly dependent on us.

And when we manage to swing that old lever around another month, we congratulate ourselves as self-made men and women about the remarkable job we've done, in spite of the fact that we know fine well, there are some things we don't quite understand. We don't really know why certain bills held on certain income

coming in. And at times we get to the end of the month and we don't quite know how it worked. And indeed we come to the end of the year and we're amazed that it worked at all. And as we look back at some of the hideous things we've come through in life, we don't quite understand how we got through them.

And yet somehow we got through them. And often we put it that way. We say, "Well, we'll get through somehow or other. We've got through things in the past. We'll get through them in the future." But all the time we have a vague sense that the whole thing is being governed and controlled by somebody maybe bigger than us. And yet we continue to sit on that cart with strain and stress inside us, worried and anxious.

How do you get rid of that strain in your life and that stress? Well you know from the illustration how. You simply recognize reality. That's all the old man did. He listened to the young man and realized, "Yeah, of course, the horse and cart is pulling me anyway, is holding me up anyway." That's what you do. You realize, now wait a minute -- I didn't make myself. I didn't create myself. Some Maker has done it. And if He's taken care of me so far and has shown such kindness as to make little birds and little dogs, and little puppies and little babies, then He must be tender hearted, and He must care about me, and it is reasonable for me to believe that, and to begin to live as if He is actually there, and to begin to put faith in the ability of this horse and cart to pull me along.

And of course faith is that. Faith is not a mental idea. It's not the old man saying, "Oh yes, I really believe this horse and cart is holding me up, but nevertheless I'll keep this wood on my own shoulders anyway." That's not faith. That's just double talk. But faith is actually putting your wood down on the cart and relaxing the strain and the stress. And that's what it takes to start life over again. That's what it takes to begin again in this life; just to begin

to believe that there is a Maker in this universe and He really does care about you.

And He is the One who has managed to bring you through so many things so far. And He will do that intensely and increasingly in your life, if you will actually give up the strain and the stress. So that's how you start. That's what is called faith.

Faith is actually "belief plus action"; believing that there is a Creator and that He does care about you, and that He does want you as His friend and then living in the light of that. And that means putting the wood down off your shoulder, the wood of your bank account, your future, your career, and your marriage. He knows when the stress is off and He begins to come through to you and lift the wood up Himself. Why not try it?